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ABSTRACT

Columbia-Greene Community College (Hudson, New York) takes a yearly 10% statistical sample of its entire circulating collection, noting the call number, acquisition year, and circulation record of each book, in order to determine the pattern of book use over the preceding 2.5 years, and to facilitate the development of an acquisition pattern that accurately reflects need. Additional useful findings which resulted from the 1986 sample are that 79% of the library's books have been used at least once since January 1977, 48% have been used in the last 2.5 years, and 78% of the books acquired since 1985 have already been used--a measure of the library's effectiveness in book selection--and that, on the average, newer books circulate far more frequently than older ones. The library also uses survey findings to determine specific areas in which purchases need to be made, and to obtain an overview of collection activity. Data from the survey covering the 2.5-year period from January 1984 through June 1986 is presented in two graphs which illustrate the percent of books that were used in each classification and the intensity of use for that period. (KM)

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What Our Book Use Study Shows Us

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What Our Book-Use Study Shows Us by Harold Ettelt

Columbia-Greene Community College is a rural comprehensive community college of approximately 1200 FTE. We have 38,000 circulating books and an annual book circulation of about 20,000. Virtually all books are selected by library staff. The collection was founded in 1969 and has never been weeded. Our acquisition and circulation years coincide with the calendar year.

Each summer we take a ten percent arithmetic sample of our entire circulating collection, noting the call number, acquisition year, and circulation record of each book. Since circulation was not recorded in our books prior to 1977, the Summer of 1986 survey covers only the 9-1/2 years since, but that is sufficient. In fact, for our main purpose we consider only the last 2-1/2 years.

Most of the actual sampling is done by student employees and for the 4000 or so books actually sampled, this takes about 40 person-hours. Transforming the raw data into information takes another 40 hours or so of regular staff time. What we get for our 80 hours is well worth the trouble. Basically we can tailor our acquisitions to the pattern of use we are actually experiencing. Redoing the survey each year takes care of any alterations in that pattern.

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We suspect that some of our findings are applicable to other academic libraries, but whether that is the case or not, the concept of the survey is certainly widely useful.

Our main goal is to discern the pattern of book use over the last 2-1/2 years. That is long enough to lessen the impact of momentary phenomena (temporary faculty, sabbaticals, etc.), but short enough to avoid reflecting long-gone situations. The attached graphs spell out the results in two forms. One graph shows simply the percent of books in each classification that were used at all, and the other shows the intensity of use. Taken together we get a fair picture of where we should purchase aggressively, just average, or only occasionally. The end result is an aquisition effort that reflects need.

Other findings that are useful in one way or another:

1. 79% of our books have been used at least once since January 1977. Taking just the last 2-1/2 years, we find 48% of all books have been used, and taking just those books acquired in 1985, 78% have already been used. Since we count as "circulated" only books actually charged out of the library, these are impressive arguments to potential budget cutters, as well as measures of our own effectiveness in book selection.

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2. Newer books circulate far more frequently than older ones, on average. The pattern for any reasonable sample shows new books being used very heavily for a few years, then a drop to a fairly stable but significantly lower rate for a few more years, and then a gradual diminuition. For example, the circulation rates in 1985 were respectively, 59%, 49%, 38%, 39%, 34%, 32%, 33%, 28%, and 20% for books purchased in 1984, 1983, 1982, 1981, 1980, 1979, 1978, 1977, and 1976 or earlier. These books were all already on the regular shelves in 1985 so there can be no skewing due to special treatment. This differential is more obvious for some classifications than others but is invariably true for all. Again a budget argument, as well as a counter to those who would measure the worth of collections by simple volume counts.

This finding is buttressed by looking at the longer term use rates. Overall, 72% of books acquired prior to January 1, 1977 have circulated at least once since, versus 87% of those acquired later. Taking just the last 2-1/2 years into account, the results are 39% for books acquired prior to 1977 versus 60% for newer books. Thus even though newer books have had fewer aggregate shelf-years in which to circulate, they have already been used more often.

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3. In the course of the survey, the age spread of the books in any area becomes obvious, alerting us to forgotten areas that could use some "new blood". It also gives us counters to faculty arguments that we are not buying in their areas. We can tell them exactly what we've been buying versus other areas, and we can match the use records as well.

4. A more generalized benefit of this survey is that it allows each of us to feel we know what is going on with the collection, how we are doing. It allows us to work in the light. And, since the survey is not kept secret, the rest of the college believes that we know what we are doing as well.

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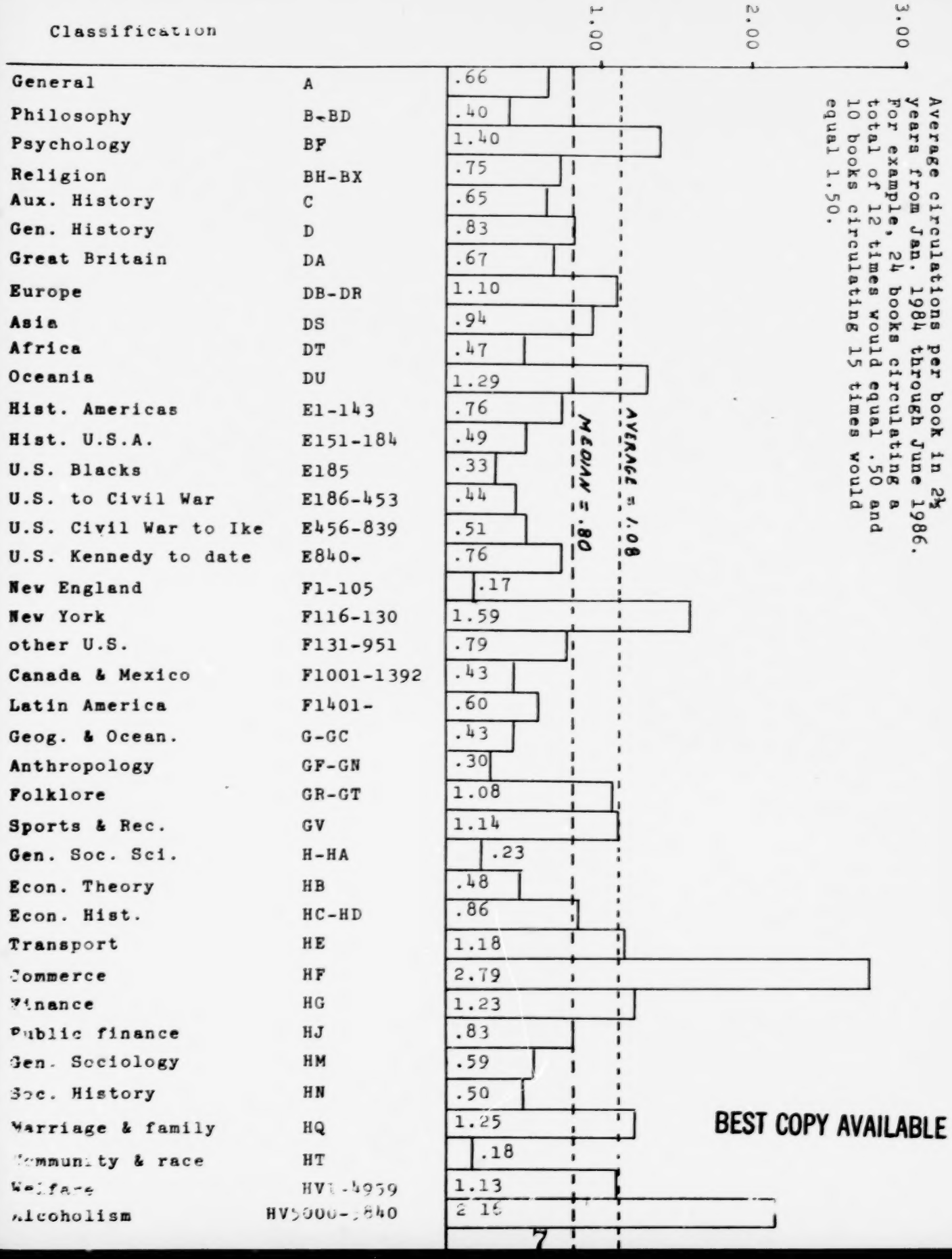
Classification
1.00
2.00
3.00
Average circulations per book in 2½ years from Jan. 1984 through June 1986. For example, 24 books circulating a total of 12 times would equal .50 and 10 books circulating 15 times would equal 1.50.
MEDIAN = .80
AVERAGE = 1.08
General A .66
Philosophy B-BD .40
Psychology BF 1.40
Religion BH-BX .75
Aux. History C .65
Gen. History D .83
Great Britain DA .67
Europe DB-DR 1.10
Asia DS .94
Africa DT .47
Oceania DU 1.29
Hist. Americas E1-143 .76
Hist. U.S.A. E151-184 .49
U.S. Blacks E185 .33
U.S. to Civil War E186-453 .44
U.S. Civil War to Ike E456-839 .51
U.S. Kennedy to date E840- .76
New England F1-105 .17
New York F116-130 1.59
other U.S. F131-951 .79
Canada & Mexico F1001-1392 .43
Latin America F1401- .60
Geog. & Ocean. G-GC .43
Anthropology GF-GN .30
Folklore GR-GT 1.08
Sports & Rec. GV 1.14
Gen. Soc. Sci. H-HA .23
Econ. Theory HB .48
Econ. Hist. HC-HD .86
Transport HE 1.18
Commerce HF 2.79
Finance HG 1.23
Public finance HJ .83
Gen. Sociology HM .59
Soc. History HN .50
Marriage & family HQ 1.25
Community & race HT .18
Welfare HV1-4939 1.13
Alcoholism HV5000-5840 2.16

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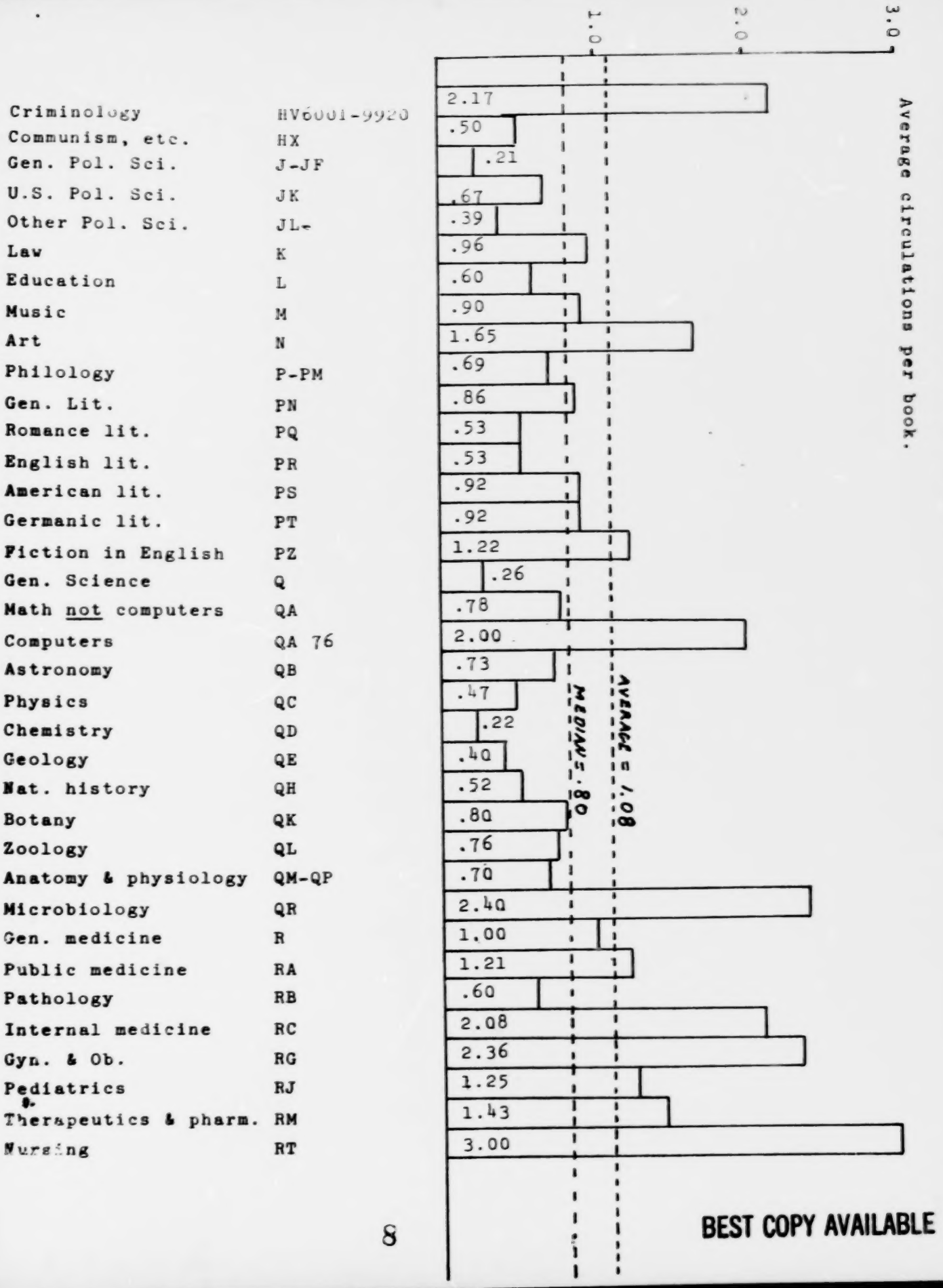

Criminology	HV6001-9920
Communism, etc.	HX
Gen. Pol. Sci.	J-JF
U.S. Pol. Sci.	JK
Other Pol. Sci.	JL-
Law	K
Education	L
Music	M
Art	N
Philology	P-PM
Gen. Lit.	PN
Romance lit.	PQ
English lit.	PR
American lit.	PS
Germanic lit.	PT
Fiction in English	PZ
Gen. Science	Q
Math not computers	QA
Computers	QA 76
Astronomy	QB
Physics	QC
Chemistry	QD
Geology	QE
Nat. history	QH
Botany	QK
Zoology	QL
Anatomy & physiology	QM-QP
Microbiology	QR
Gen. medicine	R
Public medicine	RA
Pathology	RB
Internal medicine	RC
Gyn. & Ob.	RG
Pediatrics	RJ
Therapeutics & pharm.	RM
Nursing	RT

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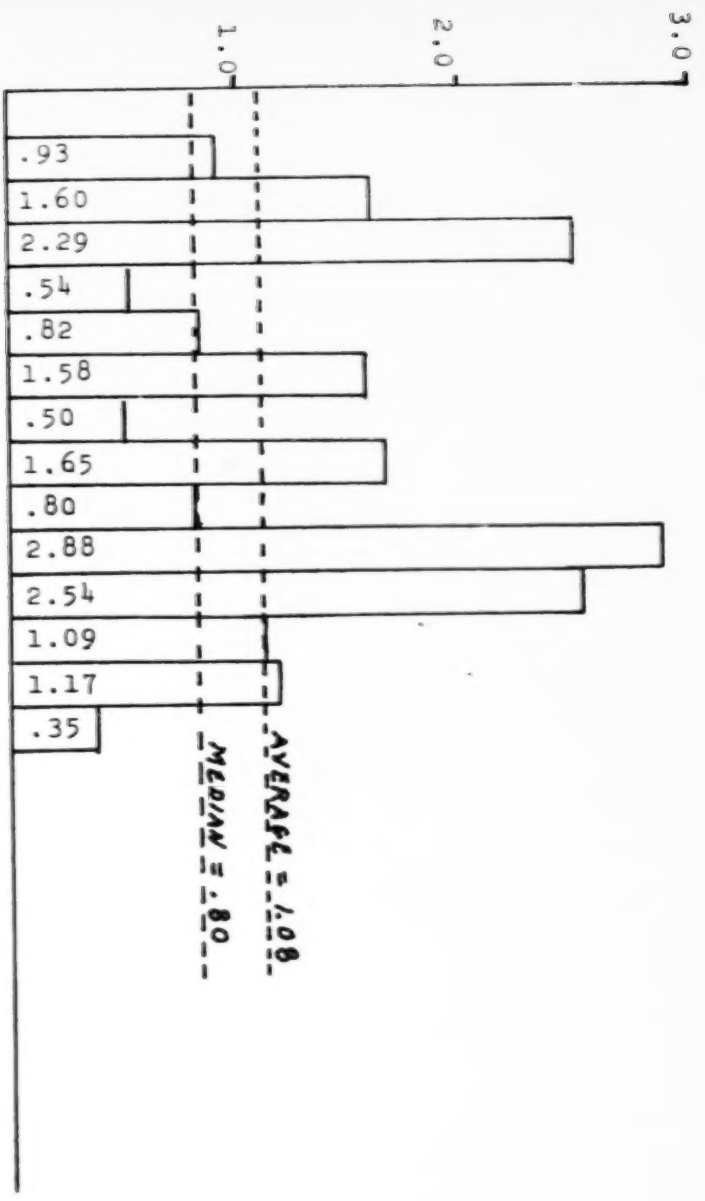

Agriculture	S
Technology	T-TD
Construction	TH
Mech. eng.	TJ
Electrical eng.	TK
Auto, aero, astro	TL
Chemical eng.	TP
Photography	TR
Manufacture	TS
Handicraft	TT
Home economics	TX
Military science	U
Naval science	V
Bibliography	Z

Average circulation per book.

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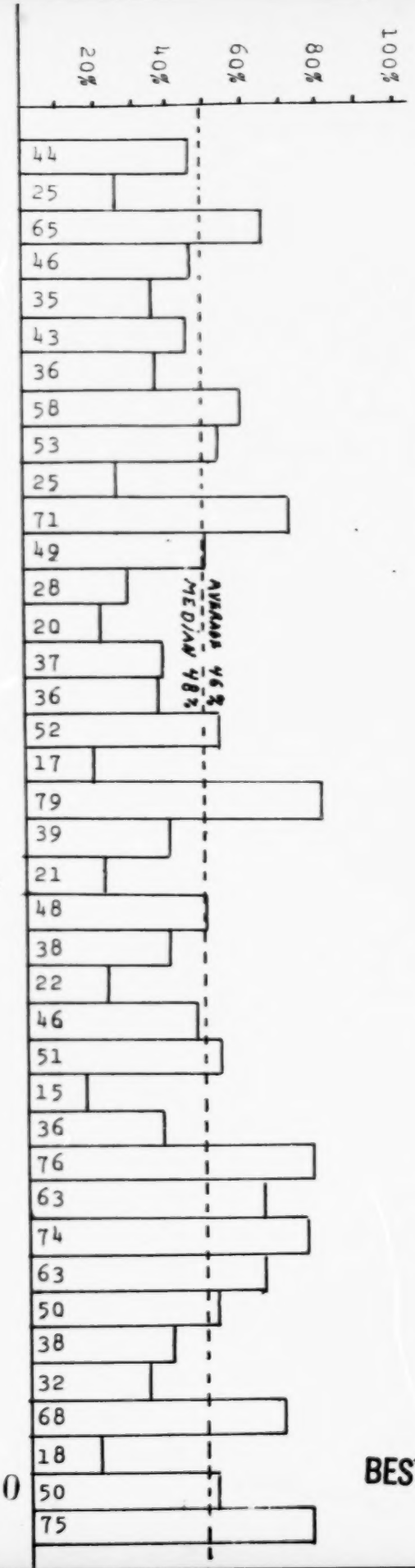
Percent of circulating books used at least once in 2½ years from Jan. 1984 through June 1986.



Classification		
General	A	44
Philosophy	B-BD	25
Psychology	BF	65
Religion	BH-BX	46
Aux. History	C	35
Gen. History	D	43
Great Britain	DA	36
Europe	DB-DH	58
Asia	DS	53
Africa	DT	25
Oceania	DU	71
Hist. Americas	E1-143	49
Hist. U.S.A.	E151-184	28
U.S. Blacks	E185	20
U.S. to Civil War	E186-453	37
U.S. Civil War to Ike	E456-839	36
U.S. Kennedy to date	E840-	52
New England	F1-105	17
New York	F116-130	79
other U.S.	F131-951	39
Canada & Mexico	F1001-1392	21
Latin America	F1401-	48
Geog. & Ocean.	G-GC	38
Anthropology	GF-GN	22
Folklore	GR-GT	46
Sports & Rec.	GV	51
Gen. Soc. Sci.	H-HA	15
Econ. Theory	HB	36
Econ. Hist.	HC-HD	76
Transport	HE	63
Commerce	HF	74
Finance	HG	63
Public finance	HJ	50
Gen. Sociology	HM	38
Soc. History	HN	32
Marriage & family	HQ	68
Community & race	HT	18
Social [illegible]	HV1-4980	50
Law	KV5000-5840	75

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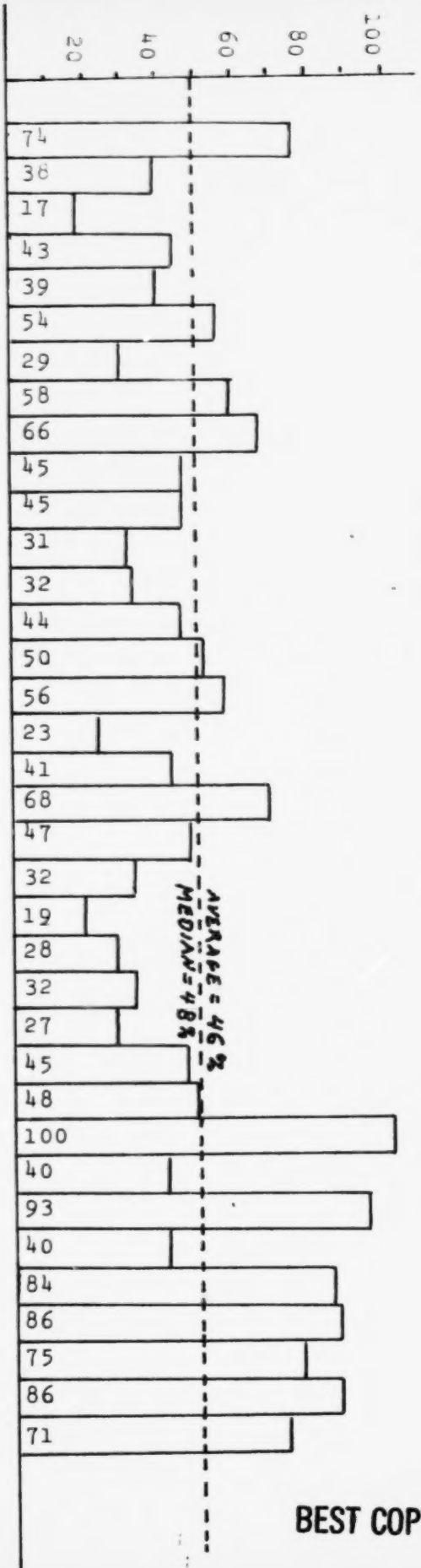
Percent of circulating books used at least once in 2½ years from Jan. 1984 through June 1986.



Criminology	HV6001-9960	74
Communism, etc.	HX	38
Gen. Pol. Sci.	J-JF	17
U.S. Pol. Sci.	JK	43
Other Pol. Sci.	JL-	39
Law	K	54
Education	L	29
Music	M	58
Art	N	66
Philology	P-PM	45
Gen. Lit.	PN	45
Romance lit.	PQ	31
English lit.	PR	32
American lit.	PS	44
Germanic lit.	PT	50
Fiction in English	PZ	56
Gen. Science	Q	23
Math not computers	QA	41
Computers	QA 76	68
Astronomy	QB	47
Physics	QC	32
Chemistry	QD	19
Geology	QE	28
Nat. history	QH	32
Botany	QK	27
Zoology	QL	45
Anatomy & physiology	QM-QP	48
Microbiology	QR	100
Gen. medicine	R	40
Public medicine	RA	93
Pathology	RB	40
Internal medicine	RC	84
Gyn. & Ob.	RG	86
Pediatrics	RJ	75
Therapeutics & pharm.	RM	86
Nursing	RT	71

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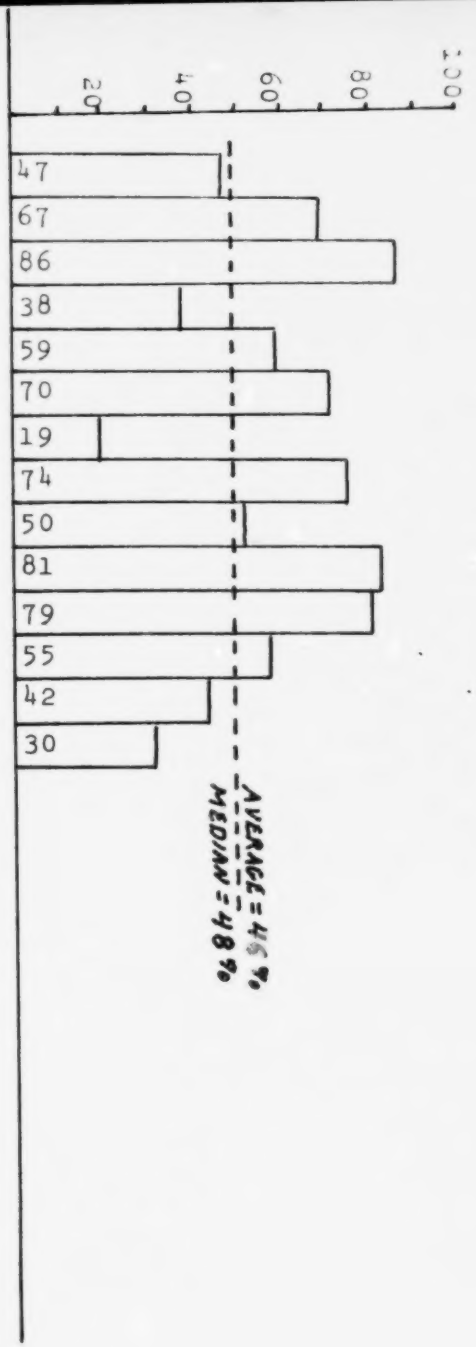
Percent of circulating books used at least once in 2½ years from Jan. 1984 through June 1986.



Agriculture	S
Technology	T-TD
Construction	TH
Mech. eng.	TJ
Electrical eng.	TK
Auto, aero, astro	TL
Chemical eng.	TP
Photography	TR
Manufacture	TS
Handicraft	TT
Home economics	TX
Military science	U
Naval science	V
Bibliography	Z

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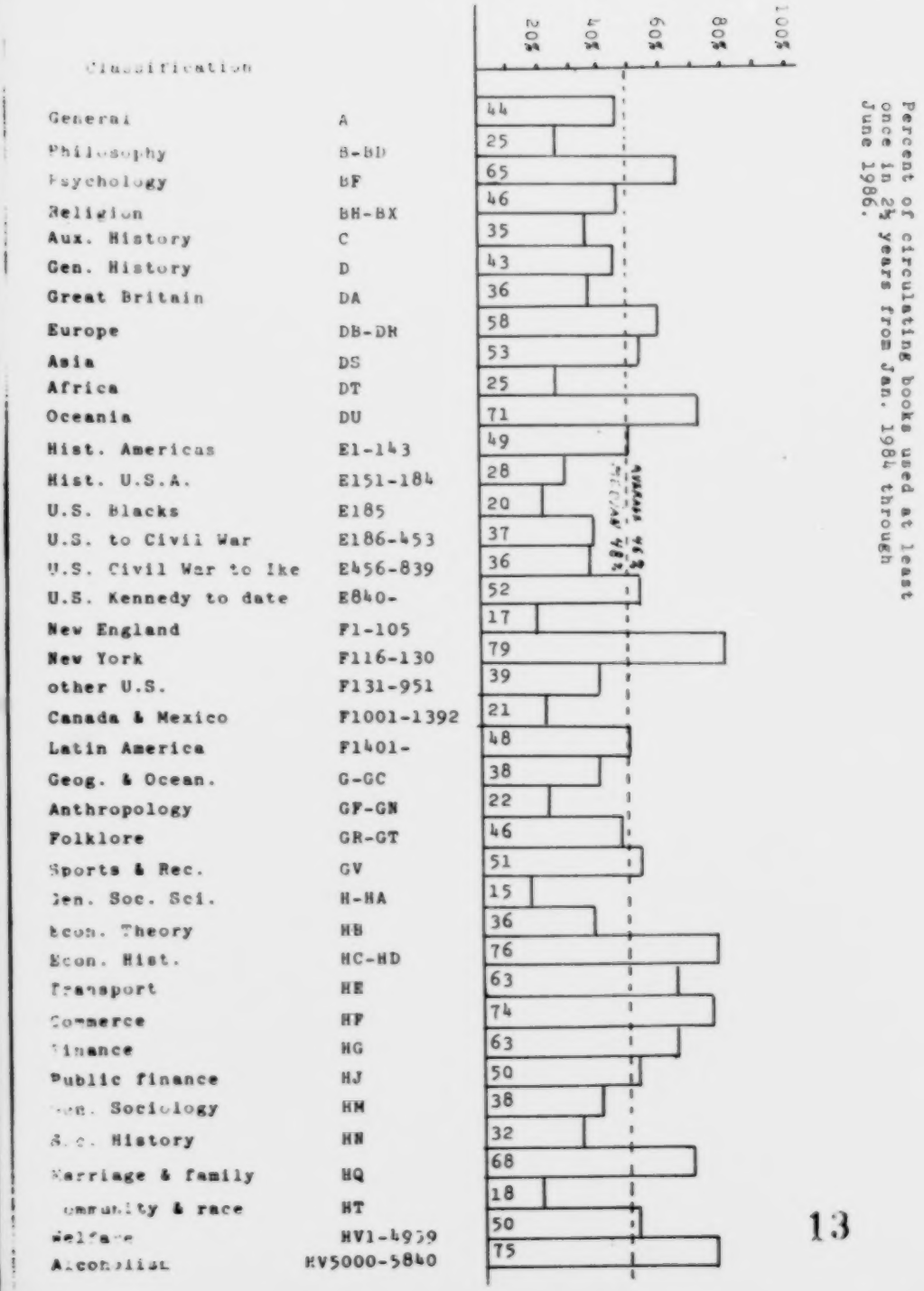

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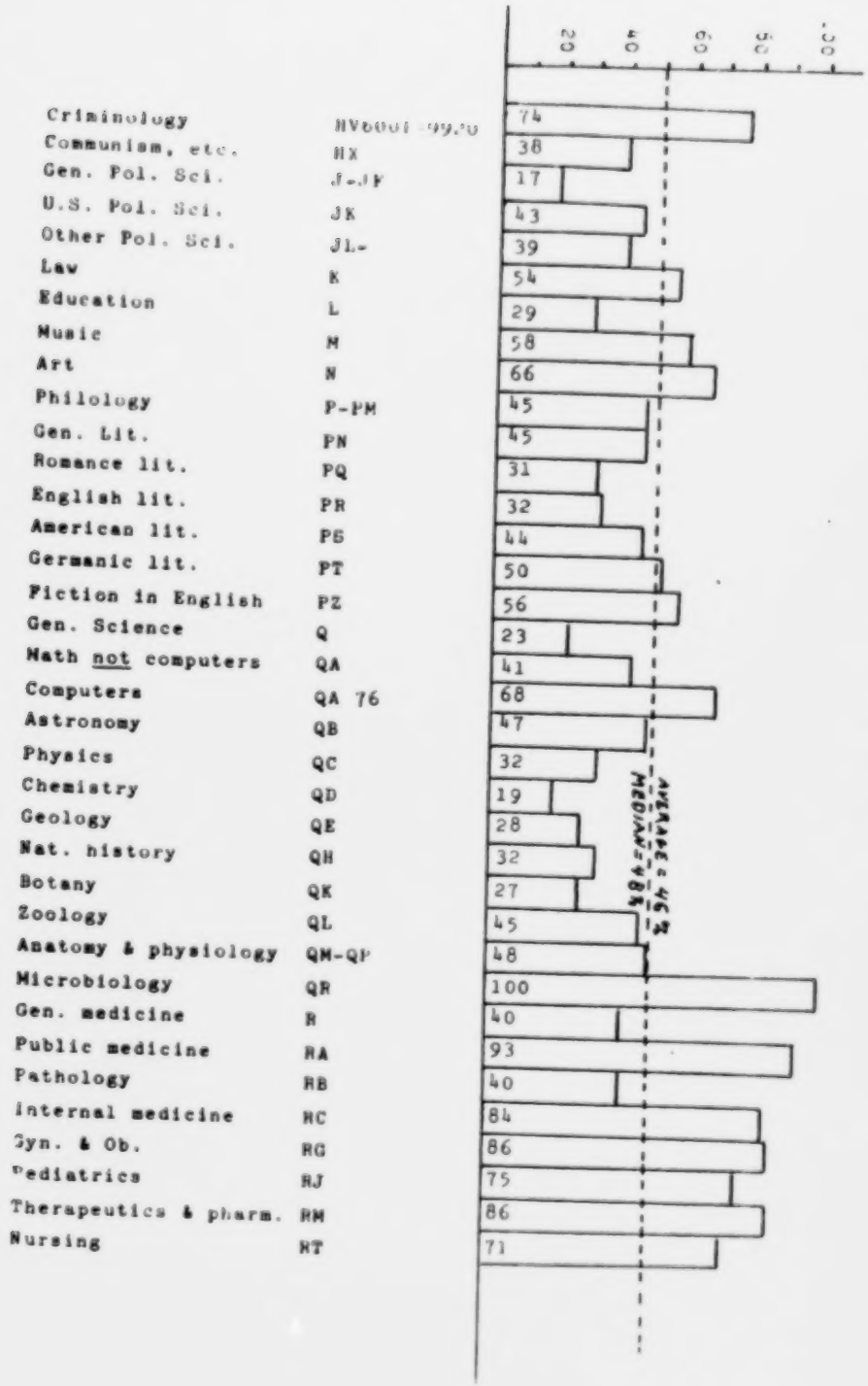

Percent of circulating books used at least once in 2½ years from Jan. 1984 through June 1986.

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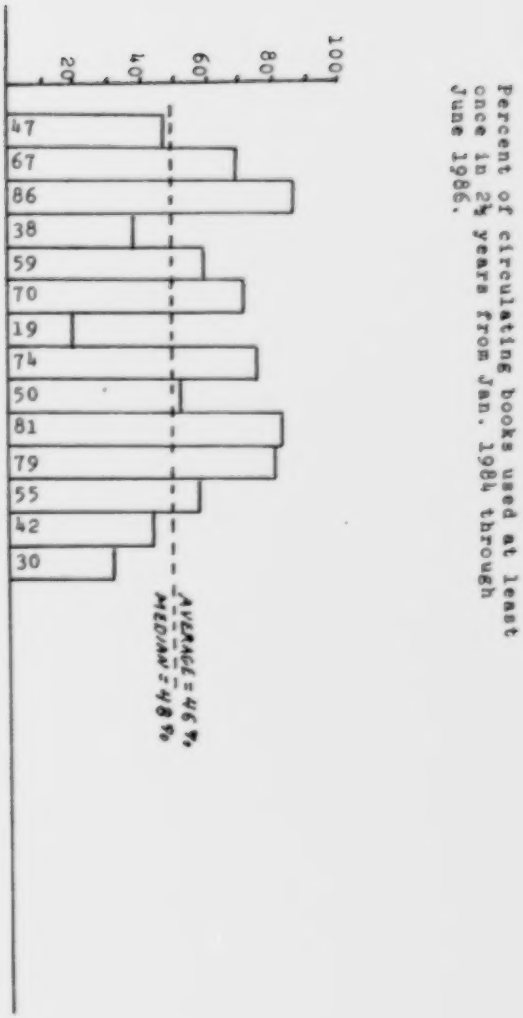
Percent of circulating books used at least once in 2½ years from Jan. 1984 through June 1986.



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Chemical eng.	TP
Photography	TR
Manufacture	TS
Handicraft	TT
Home economics	TX
Military science	U
Naval science	V
Bibliography	Z

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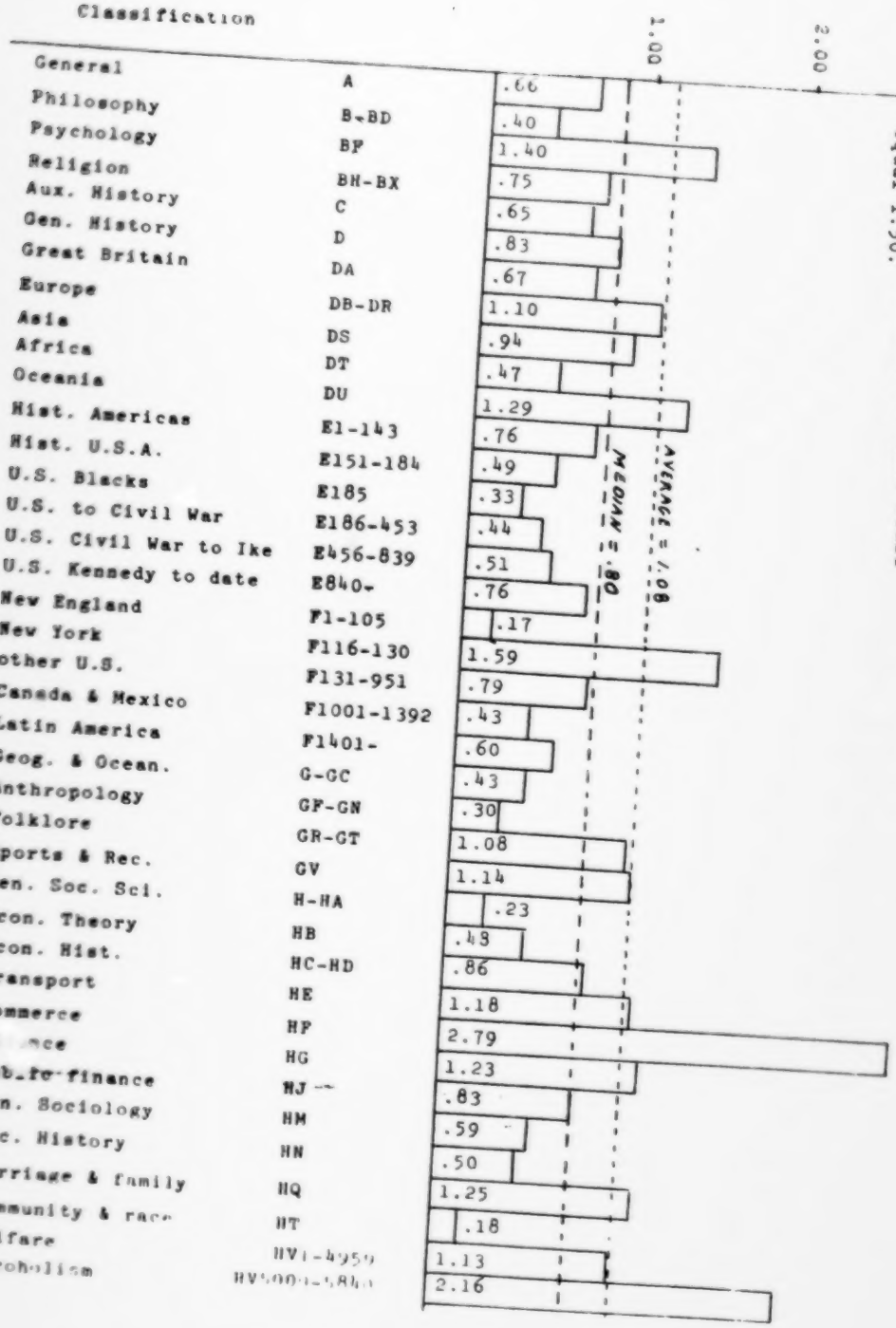
Classification
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3.00
Average circulations per book in 24 years from Jan. 1984 through June 1986. For example, 24 books circulating a total of 12 times would equal .50 and 10 books circulating 15 times would equal 1.50.
MEDIAN = .80
AVERAGE = 1.08
General A .66
Philosophy B-BD .40
Psychology BF 1.40
Religion BH-BX .75
Aux. History C .65
Gen. History D .83
Great Britain DA .67
Europe DB-DR 1.10
Asia DS .94
Africa DT .47
Oceania DU 1.29
Hist. Americas E1-143 .76
Hist. U.S.A. E151-184 .49
U.S. Blacks E185 .33
U.S. to Civil War E186-453 .44
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Commerce HF 2.79
Finance HG 1.23
Public finance HJ- .83
Gen. Sociology HM .59
Soc. History HN .50
Marriage & family HQ 1.25
Community & race HT .18
Welfare HV1-4959 1.13
Alcoholism HV5000-5840 2.16

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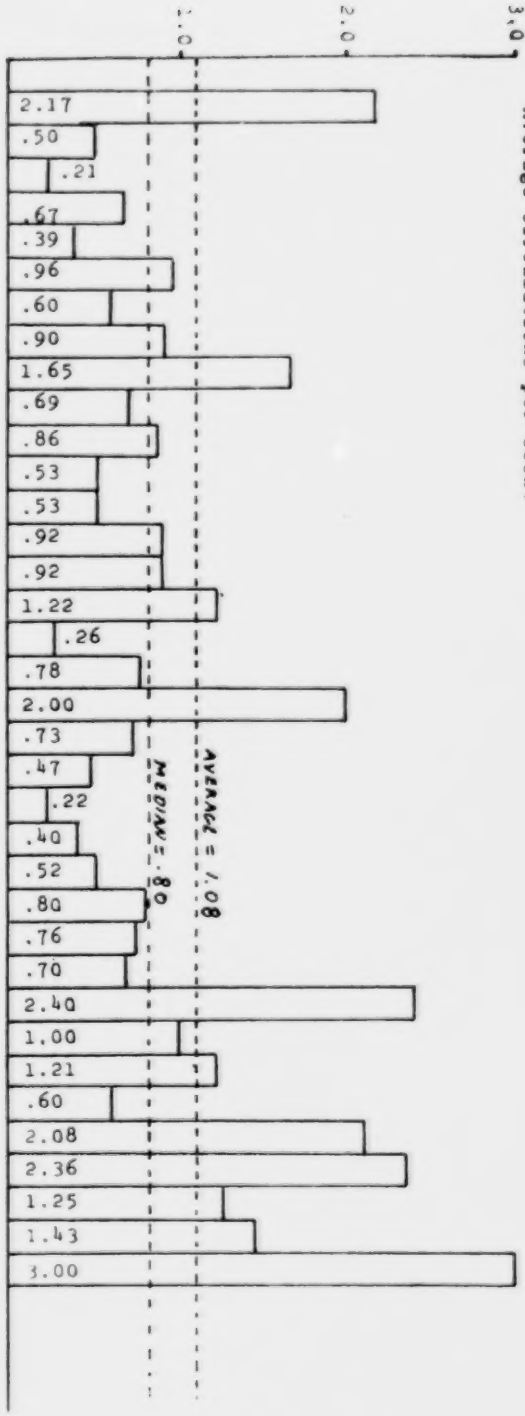
Criminology	HV6001-9920
Communism, etc.	HX
Gen. Pol. Sci.	J-JF
U.S. Pol. Sci.	JK
Other Pol. Sci.	JL-
Law	K
Education	L
Music	M
Art	N
Philology	P-PM
Gen. Lit.	PN
Romance lit.	PQ
English lit.	PR
American lit.	PS
Germanic lit.	PT
Fiction in English	PZ
Gen. Science	Q
Math not computers	QA
Computers	QA 76
Astronomy	QB
Physics	QC
Chemistry	QD
Geology	QE
Nat. history	QH
Botany	QK
Zoology	QL
Anatomy & physiology	QM-QP
Microbiology	QR
Gen. medicine	R
Public medicine	RA
Pathology	RB
Internal medicine	RC
Gyn. & Ob.	RG
Pediatrics	RJ
Therapeutics & pharm.	RM
Nursing	RT



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Technology	T-TD
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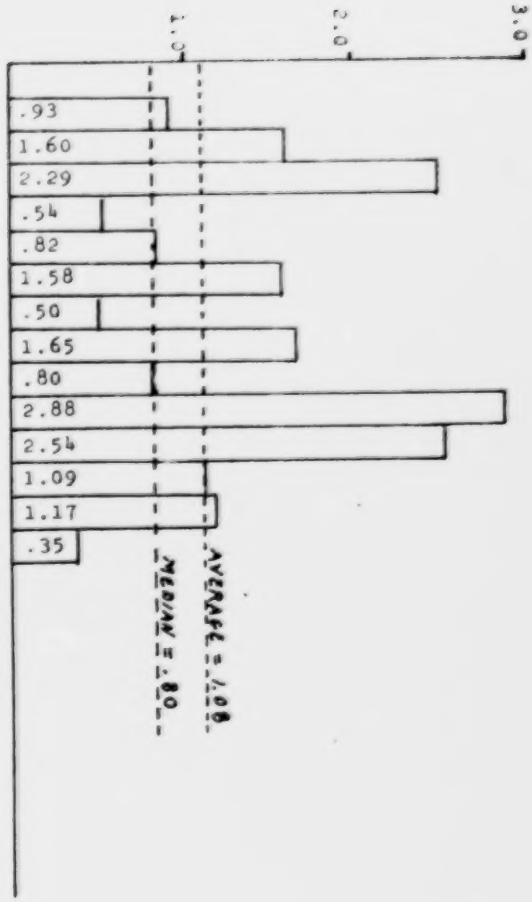
Handicraft	TT
Home economics	TX
Military science	U
Naval science	V
Bibliography	Z



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